

**MODULE IV: HADRACHAT ACHERIM —  
MENTORING AND GROWING OTHERS**

In preparation for Module IV, read “**Ask What, Not Why?**” by Laura Berman Fortgang, (Fortgang, L. B. (2001) *Living Your Best Life: Work, Home, Balance, Destiny*. New York: Putnam).

**GUIDED QUESTIONS:**

- According to Fortgang, why does “what” work?
- What question do you find you ask most in leadership situation: How? What? Why? Where?

The following excerpt is taken from Chapter One of LIVING YOUR BEST LIFE. Imagine your brain as one big search engine. When you need answers in life, you form questions that serve as your keywords. Your brain then searches its resources and gives out possible answers. The more specific your keyword entry, the more specific the answer. This excerpt, "Ask What, Not Why" discusses which questions access your inner-wisdom and move you toward your goal, and which will return the equivalent of an "Error 404: File not Found" message.

**Laura Berman Fortgang** is one of America's foremost life and career coaches. She has been featured on the "Oprah Winfrey Show," and profiled in such publications as "The Wall Street Journal," "USA Today," and "Glamour." Her column on Women.com is read by more than five million people every month.

More about the book and author follows the excerpt. You can further wire yourself for [wisdom](#) by joining Laura Berman Fortgang for an online chat on Thursday, May 23rd at 10:00 p.m. ET/7:00 p.m. PT at World Without Borders .

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## ASK WHAT, NOT WHY

Reckoning with your mind in order to free up your capacity for [wisdom](#) is the ongoing battle of life. For some, the battle is constant; others are not as affected. Regardless of which category you fall into, this chapter will give you the first tool for accessing the [wisdom](#) that can change your life. It's a tool you use every day: the ordinary, common question.

One of the most common questions we ask is "Why?" "Why" is the language of seeking to understand. When we were young children, we used this question to figure out how the world works: "Why is the sky blue?," "Why did Sparky run away?" As we get older, we still use "why" to bring our circumstances into alignment with our ability to understand our world.

Unfortunately, "why" eventually loses its power to move us forward; instead, we get "stuck" by obsessing over questions like "Why did that happen?," "Why am I this way?," and "Why aren't I better-thinner-smarter?"

Even if you're not in the throes of despair, you might still be stuck using despair's questions. When you use "why" to ask a question, you are struggling to come up with information to help you understand a situation or circumstance. I call this asking an information question. Information questions will give you answers that explain the past. They yield answers that fill the coffers of your mind with details, as well as emotion, blame, and perhaps even more problems. While we assume that more information will enable us to be released from our problems, an information question does little to move you forward in life. In fact, sometimes they can't even be answered. In working with clients for almost a decade, I've seen them endure more frustration than necessary because they asked too many information questions. Asking bad questions is a bad habit.

But don't get me wrong: asking "Why?" has been the key to many a brilliant discovery. When it comes to making changes in our lives, however, "why" is not an effective short-term tool. The way to your life blueprint requires asking deeper, more useful questions in order to get better answers and more effective action. The questions that will help you do that are access questions, which I like to call [Wisdom Access Questions](#). These questions access your innate wisdom to create positive, forward motion.

## WISDOM ACCESS QUESTIONS

Imagine your brain as one big Yahoo.com. It is a search engine tapping into a data bank of information that you already have available to you and that is made up of acquired experience, knowledge, and intuition. When you need answers in life, you form questions that serve as your keywords. Your brain then searches its resources and gives out possible answers. The more specific your keyword entry, the more specific your

answer -- that's the wisdom of the computer. How did it know you needed exactly that? You told it your question and it found the answer for you. This is what [Wisdom Access Questions \(WAQs\)](#) will do -- help you be specific in your information gathering so you can come up with answers that have the power to move you forward.

Nearly all the questions we ask begin with one of five words: "who," "what," "why," "when," or "how." Although these words help us gather facts and understand each other in conversation, not all of them yield wisdom. We've already eliminated "why" as a viable [Wisdom Access Question](#). "Who," "when," and "how" fall into the information question category. However, using "what" helps the brain behave as an efficient search engine. "What" questions force you to be specific in your query and being specific leads to solution and awareness; on the other hand, asking "Why?" leaves you with only the question.

For example, if I asked you, "Why are you reading this book?," you might tell me a story about some things you are wondering about. Maybe you'd go on to provide a few details about what brought you to this moment of information seeking. Your responses would probably have something to do with your past. But if I asked, "What outcome do you want to reach by reading this book?," the answer you give would be future-oriented. It would also be much more specific, since you would be forced to look forward, rather than backward. This releases energy and moves you from feeling stuck to living in possibility -- you can see opportunities just over the horizon.

So let me ask you again: What outcome do you want to reach by reading this book? Answers like "To get a new life," "To be happier in what I do," or "To find the guts to take a huge risk" have a momentum of their own -- regardless of what the final result ends up being, these responses get you moving toward a goal.

The search engine in our brains is highly sophisticated, but it requires a well-phrased question to take advantage of it. WAQs are designed to do that. Using "what" questions provides the opportunity to start you along the road to accessing your own wisdom.

Take a look at the list of questions below and see how you can make any question a Wisdom Access Question by using "what."

## CONVERTING INFORMATION QUESTIONS INTO WISDOM ACCESS QUESTIONS

*\*Instead of Asking Yourself\* / \*Ask\**

Why is this happening to me? / What do I need to get through this?

Why am I such a failure? / What will get me what I want?

Why aren't I better at this? / What can I do to improve?

Why can't I get it? / What do I need to know to understand?

Why can't I have a charmed life like \_\_\_\_? / What can I learn from \_\_\_\_\_ ?

*\*Instead of Asking Others\* / \*Ask\**

Why did she say that? / What could have made her say that?

Whose fault was it? / What is the solution?

Who did what? / What would have made a difference?

What happened [seeking details] / What happened? [seeking outcome]

Why would they do that? / What could be learned from this?

How will you do that? / What will you do?

## HOW AND WHEN TO USE WAQs

Imagine two friends commiserating over a problem. One is expressing a complaint and the other is taking the supportive role. If the supporter was to ask information questions -- Where were you? Who started it? Why? -- he would be treated to details about who did what to whom in a blow-by-blow reenactment of the drama. However, if the supporter knew how to ask Wisdom Access Questions -- What is upsetting about what happened? -- the friend with the problem would move from problem to solution in record-breaking time.

To find the appropriate "what" question to ask, you must change the focus from details and information to outcomes. Get away from trying to understand a problem and move toward solving it. In the process, you'll see that you don't really need to understand a dilemma to know how to solve it. Using "what" questions will train you to think toward the future, as if you are already ahead of the problem. "What" assumes that a solution is the goal.

Sometimes, we want to be left alone with our problems for a while. Have you ever tried to help a friend who didn't really want help? Remember how frustrated that left you feeling? When you or someone you know wants to mull over a problem, not solve it, all the WAQs in the world are not going to help. You must truly want to stop ruminating and start solving the problem if "what" questions are to be of any use.

Even though you can do this all by yourself, I believe it helps to watch other people gain clarity when you ask them "what" questions. Asking WAQs is a productive and highly generous listening tool for you to use with friends, colleagues, and loved ones. Allowing another person to hear herself is a wonderful gift. This kind of thoughtful communication takes time and patience, but it will improve the quality of the relationship. Whether you use Wisdom Access Questions to move yourself or someone else forward, keep in mind that you have found a great tool.

I use WAQs with my clients, thus enabling them to create more positive circumstances more quickly than they do on their own. My clients predictably begin to experience breakthroughs, both small and large, which I really can't take credit for. I'm just there asking the right question. It's my clients who have the answers -- they just needed a prompt in order to accelerate the discovery.

Nothing makes me happier than to hear a client say, "That's a good question." Or better yet, "I hate you for asking me that!" Those are surefire signs that we have struck gold-wisdom.

Let's get question-asking to work for you. If you are ready to begin using WAQs, it may be hard to phrase them properly at first. The two conversations that follow cover the same subject matter but with dramatically different results. In the first, you'll see a coach speak with a client in a more conventional way, without using Wisdom Access Questions.

client: Something's really bothering me about this decision and I can't quite put my finger on it.

coach: Why do you think that is?

client: I don't know. I've been giving it a lot of thought, but nothing's clear.

coach: Why do you think this is bothering you?

client: It's something about this guy....

coach: Was it something he said to you?

client: Oh, he said he knew these people who could help with the deal and then, when I asked who they were, he avoided giving me names.

coach: How did that make you feel?

client: Annoyed.

coach: Did any one thing annoy you?

client: Just everything.

coach: Do you know what you want to do now?

client: Just drop the whole thing, I think. But I'm just not sure.

The coach's questions asked here focus on information seeking, and in such a nonspecific way that the client isn't prompted to provide dynamic answers that would propel him forward. There is no freedom from the problem, no break from its burden, no movement toward a solution.

Now compare the approach in our next example, where the coach uses WAQs.

client: Something's really been bothering me about this decision and I can't quite put my finger on it.

coach: Take a guess -- *\*what\** is it that's bugging you?

client: I don't know.

coach: If you pretended you knew, *\*what\** would you say?

client: Hmm. I don't trust the guy who brought me the idea.

coach: You don't trust the guy. *\*What\** led you to that conclusion?

client: He has been very vague. He won't commit to anything he has said. I've even asked him about it.

coach: *\*What\** do you need to move ahead?

client: I need to find someone I can trust.

coach: Great. Any ideas as to who?

client: Yes. There's another guy I think could do the job much better.

coach: When will you call him?

client: Today!

Eureka! Clarity, relief, action, forward motion. Here, the client's answers are dynamic and they ring with certainty. Wisdom is attained and, with it, a break from the burden of the problem. This liberating break is the result of using Wisdom Access Questions.

#### CASE STUDY: USING "WHAT" AS A WAQ

Peggy is a corporate executive who participated in one of my wisdom seminars. She told me about an employee who always saw the glass as half empty, never half full. He found the fault in anything and the negative side of everything. Peggy felt he didn't want to take responsibility for his actions. He justified everything he did by saying it was someone else's fault or someone gave him the wrong information. Peggy struggled with how to get him to see that he was indeed involved and accountable for his own words and actions.

On a recent conference call, Peggy had to deliver some difficult news to her team about significant changes in the company. This employee was on the call and was disruptive and very self-involved. It made her realize she had to address his [behavior](#) sooner rather than later.

"What I really wanted to say to him," Peggy told me, "was 'Who do you think you are? Why do you expect me or the company to help you? Why do you always see things in the most negative light? If you spent less time on the phone gossiping, you'd have the time and positive energy to devote to planning and executing for success. And the way to get any positive reinforcement from me, or to get me to embrace the issue as you see it, is not by being passive-aggressive on a conference call, asking me the same question four times, or pushing my hot buttons in an attempt to corner me into a response. Whether you like it or not, I am the manager. You are the representative. This is not a democracy. I will lead and you will follow.'"

Instead, Peggy addressed the issue with her employee in a casual conversation over dinner. She had her notes from my seminar with her, along with a list of WAQs. Here's what she said:

"On our conference call, I picked up on the tension in your voice. Tell me what you found upsetting about the new incentive plan. Let me ask that another way. What emotion was triggered in you as we discussed the plan? What do you want now? What is your goal for this year? What will get you what you want? What can I do to help? What can we do together to make it work?"

The employee was bowled over, but also stymied. He'd been expecting Peggy to go for the jugular, but she didn't buy into his crisis. She consciously decided to pull back and once he realized there would be no fight, he was forced to respond in the same way. The Wisdom Access Questions Peggy asked left no room for excuses, self-justification, or any defensive behaviors. He was left with no one to look at but himself. After this frank, open discussion, he and Peggy were aware of his insecurities, his fears, and his goals.

She was able to learn what he wanted from her as his boss because she used WAQs. They diffused a very difficult situation. You saw the raw emotional reaction in her words to me, which anyone could understand and relate to. However, Peggy made a deliberate choice to seek a solution instead of fishing for more information, and getting mired in emotion, blame, and details. In so doing, she was able to improve a working relationship she long ago decided was beyond repair. This was a challenge for Peggy, but in committing to elevating the exchange, she challenged her employee too, and together they got new, unexpected results. Wisdom Access Questions were essential in making this possible.

#### WAQs AND RELATIONSHIPS

You've seen how Wisdom Access Questions help in a work-related scenario, but they are equally effective in other areas of your life, such as romantic relationships. My friend Scott recently told me how WAQs led him and his wife to have what she said was "one of the best conversations" they'd had in years. His wife had a problem she wanted to discuss, and what Scott had done was resist his natural urge to jump in with a solution. Instead, he talked through the issues involved, using "what" questions only. His wife was able to

solve her own problem, thanks in no small part to Scott's attentive questions. She felt connected to him and very loved and supported.

Scott understood that he did not have to "do" anything for his wife. Nor did he have to "fix" anything for her. Just asking the right questions was the loving listening and helpful support she needed.

Never underestimate the power of a few access questions to raise the level of intimacy in a relationship. When people feel heard and when they are helped to hear themselves, they often experience a deep connection to the power they have. This is often translated into deep [gratitude](#) for the person who helped them get there. Whether they are conscious of it or not, this greater sense of connection to oneself and another makes for the kind of relationships most people are looking for.

## A CAVEAT

As you begin to realize the benefit of using WAQs in your home and work life, I need to warn you of an exception to the "It's good to ask 'What?'" rule. There is in fact one "what" question that is not a WAQ, but an "information" question. You've probably used it countless times on yourself and on others. Ready?

"What should I do?"

Oh, yes, that's a very big "what" question but definitely not a WAQ. How many times have you asked friends, "What should I do?," or told yourself you "really should" do x, y or z? The answers to "What should I do?" prevent you from asking the most powerful WAQ you can use. It's very simple and it's the exact opposite: "What do I want?"

That's it. I know it sounds very simple. And very easy. But most people have a really hard time answering this question, because most of us don't know what we want. I see this up close every day. Most smart, sophisticated people, with goals and plans, \*think\* they know what they want. However, truly having a sense of what would make them happy is a different story. We tend to be much more certain of what we should do, say, wear, or look like than of what will guide us to inner [happiness](#).

It is my experience that seven out of ten people don't really know what they want. They think they do, but they come to discover that much of what drives them is unmet needs or the expectations of others. We will work on making sure you do know what you want in Part Two, but for now just avoid asking the information question "What should I do?"

## CASE STUDY: THE POWER OF "WANT" VERSUS "SHOULD"

My phone rang. It was time for Patricia's fourth session with me and, upon picking up the phone, I could instantly hear her agitation. "I've been trying to rewrite my r?um?all week and I just can't decide which direction will make it what I want it to be. Should I be focusing on getting a job in advertising or make it read stronger for work in [softwaremarketing](#)?"

Patricia was a singer/songwriter by avocation and a successful communications professional in the "real world." She wanted to solidify her plans to find more fulfilling work in the career that paid the bills and, at the same time, further her artistic endeavors. In our earlier sessions, she had said things like "I just don't know what to do. I have to think more about what I should do. Maybe if I try to do both. What do you think I should do?"

"What I think doesn't matter right now," I'd replied. "What you think does."

Patricia's high level of [anxiety](#) and her constant use of the word "should" was a red flag, so I gave her an assignment. "Patricia," I said, "for the next week, I want you to eliminate the word 'should' from your vocabulary."

After a moment of silence, Patricia asked, "Well, what should I say?" She then chuckled, realizing the word had slipped out again.

"Use the word 'want' for one week and see what happens. Ask yourself what you want instead of repeatedly asking what you should do."

When we had our next session on the phone, it was like I was speaking to a new person.

"Hi Patricia."

"Hi, Laura. I want to be in advertising!"

By asking herself Wisdom Access Questions instead of the information-seeking "What should I do?," Patricia was able to discover what she truly wanted. She had carved wisdom out of all her confusion simply by changing the questions she was asking. She was starting to unlock the life that would make her happiest.

## IT'S MORE THAN THE WORDS

We have seen that changing a few words in a WAQ can make a world of difference in the quality of the answer you receive, but the truth is that changing the words alone is not enough. Getting good answers to access questions depends not only on what words you use but on where your underlying focus is. To get the best results, your underlying focus should be on solutions and forward motion for your life. When you play with the words, the questions change and their power to change your life multiplies. By committing to monitoring your inner [motivation](#), however, you not only change your life, but begin to transform who you are.

When you can remain above the fray and stay focused on solutions and forward motion during the adversities of your life, you've begun to align with your blueprint. Your life can flow instead of getting stopped behind a dam of blame, criticism, problems, and [anxiety](#). The focus of your inner [motivation](#) (intention) makes all the difference. In the reckoning there are really only two choices: Are you someone who intends to stay "stuck," or are you someone who intends to move forward? To use a Wisdom Access Question successfully, you must intend to move forward.

This reminds me of how I learned to drive in Manhattan. For a decade, I refused to drive there because of the terror that consumed me as taxis and buses cut me off. I would continually become exasperated, swearing and wondering, "What's wrong with these people?" One day, as I was complaining about my inability to drive myself into the city, my husband uttered a few simple words that rocked my driving world: "The thing to remember to drive well in Manhattan is to never stop moving forward."

Not only is this a great mantra for driving, it works for life. I'm not talking about motion for motion's sake, but about focusing your efforts on getting out of any potholes as soon as you can, even if you fall back into them later. Although such a shift in focus may require a fundamental change in you, it's the only way to ensure that when you ask WAQs, you're not just mouthing the words.

## ARE YOU AN INFORMATION SEEKER OR A WISDOM SEEKER?

Let's take a look at what kinds of intentions you've been working with. The following list describes two very different kinds of [motivation](#) in asking questions. Most people are basically information seekers or wisdom seekers, although you may exhibit characteristics of both. Which type are you?

**\*Characteristics of Information Seeker\***

- Asks questions that are self-centered (What's wrong with me, the world, the situation in relation to how it affects me?)
- Digs for evidence to justify point of view
- Is oriented toward problems
- Is territorial and assumes everything is scarce
- Hoards and controls information and knowledge
- Reacts without thinking to problems and people
- Must have or give answers as part of identity
- Holds knowledge as a source of power, something to manipulate and control

**\*Characteristics of Wisdom Seeker\***

- Asks questions that are focused outward (What's right about me, the world, the situation? How does it **add** up to a whole?)
- Explores as an objective observer to find truth
- Is oriented toward solutions
- Assumes ample resources are available
- Sees information and knowledge as things to be shared
- Thinks and reflects before taking action
- Is comfortable with waiting for answers and with appearing to "not know" temporarily
- Holds knowledge as a source of power, something to inspire and transform

Each list will give you choices as to how you can use questions and help you determine which characteristics you are predisposed to. There is nothing wrong with finding yourself in the information seeker list, but you will see that you could be making better choices, asking different questions and producing less stressful outcomes if you focus on becoming the wisdom seeker.

To experience your life unfolding with ease, the shift from information seeker to wisdom seeker becomes necessary. We will explore how to make the shifts in Parts Two and Three, but let's use the next **exercise** to learn how your motivation may need to change. Take your time here, in order to absorb how this could transform your life.

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## ABOUT THE BOOK

LIVING YOUR BEST LIFE: Ten Strategies for Getting from Where You Are to Where You're Meant to Be by Laura Berman Fortgang Published by Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, a member of Penguin Putnam, Inc. (ISBN: 1-58542-092-1, 224 pages, \$23.95)

A founding member of the International Coach Federation and the president and owner of InterCoach, Laura Berman Fortgang is at the forefront of one of the fastest-growing consulting disciplines in the world. Teaching advanced communication and living skills, Fortgang has helped thousands of clients find more rewarding careers, make more money, and exchange a stressful daily treadmill of endless goal-seeking for life in which gains come easily.

In this book, Fortgang shares her secrets of personal and professional balance and fulfillment. She presents ten tried- and-true strategies that lead to what she calls a "best life" -- one in which we:

- \* Have more than enough time for the things that really matter to us.
- \* Attract opportunities, seemingly without effort.
- \* Resolve problems and crises with greater ease.

- \* Take chances that move our lives forward.
- \* Have deep respect for the individuals we are.

Fortgang suggests that instead of frenetically trying to have it all, we focus on asking ourselves what we really want by posing questions that lead us to positive action. Offering accessible, easy-to-follow techniques, she shows us how to discover our own unique "lucrative purpose" and to design a "magnet" life plan -- perfectly suited to our needs -- that honors our true desires and talents and draws to us the more satisfying existence we deserve.

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